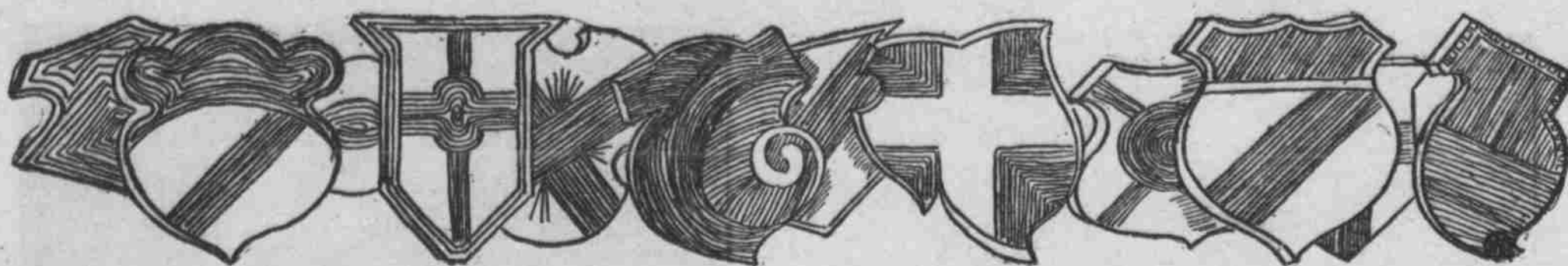


A Little Traitor to the South--A War-Time Com-



edy With a Tragic Interlude by Cyrus Townsend Brady

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CHAPTER III.

How the Opportunity Was Presented.

WELL, Sempland," said Lacy, with astonishing courtesy and forbearance under all the circumstances, as he overtook the other man plodding along the shaded street, "you don't seem to be in much greater favor with the young lady than I."

"Lacy," returned the other, "you did well this evening. You are not good enough for Miss Glen, I still think. Nobody is for that matter, but you less than others. My opinion of you, you know."

"Faith, all the world may know it apparently!"

"That's unjust. I have never mentioned it to anyone and should not have expressed it to Miss Glen had it not been to save her. But you showed the stuff that was in you, that used to be in you, tonight. It was fine. I thank you for having said—" he paused.

"What?" asked Lacy.

"Why, that about my not having had a chance, you know."

"Oh, that was a trifle."

"I know. But not many men would have said it at the time."

"I tell you what it is, Sempland. I like you, I always have liked you. When I—er—dropped out of the old set, you know, before the war, I didn't mind giving up anyone so much as you. And I was sorry for you tonight. You hadn't had a chance. God knows I love the girl, but I am not the man for her. I would break her heart in a month. You don't know women, I take it, but I think she will be yours in the end. I give her to you."

"She is not yours to give."

"No. I know she isn't. But I withdraw in your favor."

"I don't want that sort of a fair field. Harry," went on the other man, unconsciously dropping into the familiar form of boyhood, which caused Lacy's face to flush with pleasure, "I am sure she loves you. I thought it was I at first, but since this afternoon I have changed my mind. Why can't you be different? You are not a fit man to marry any honest woman now, and when I thought of your record I doubted that you ever would be. I was sure you would not, but—see here, old man! Throw the past aside! A fellow that's got it in him to do what you have done for the south—why can't you control yourself? Turn over a new leaf. I love her, too. She's more to me than life itself, but her happiness is more than mine. If she loves you and wants you, make yourself worthy of her. By heaven, I'll help you if it kills me! You thought I was harsh today. I swear to you if you succeed nobody will acknowledge it quicker than I!"

"Will you tell her so?"

"I will!"

"Rhett," said the other man, stretching out his hand, "the woman I love has this day honored me, but by heaven, I believe you have honored me more. I did think it was a low-down trick for you to go to Miss Glen, but I know why you did it and you were right. It's too late. I can never be anything different. My father and grandfather both died in drunken sprees—it's in my blood. I can't help it. I've had a chance or two to do something a little out of the ordinary in this war, thank God for it, but I suppose the reason I was able to carry it through was that I cared little whether I lived or died. No, that isn't true. I'd rather die than live, but I would like to go out of existence doing something fine and noble. I—I might get a better chance on the other side then, you know. Life is nothing to me, and there are no possibilities in it."

He spoke bitterly. It was rare that anyone saw him in that mood.

"I tell you I'm cursed! I wouldn't take that girl if she did accept me. I only wanted to trouble you. Well, no, not exactly that, either. I love her, God knows, but the devil's got me in his grip and—"

"I can't understand it," said Sempland vaguely.

"Of course you can't. You're so strong and so self-contained—such as you never can understand such as I. But to be a drunkard, and a gambler, and a—"

He stopped and threw up his hands, and then dropped them heavily by his side.

"It's in my blood, I tell you! It is not all my fault. Yet there is good in me, enough good to make me go mad if I stop to think

of it. I want some way to get out of this life with honor. I leave the field to you."

"She doesn't love—"

"You're a fool, Sempland—forgive me—about that woman. I know women better than you. Not so much the good as the bad, but in some things women are alike, a woman is a woman whatever she does. That girl loves the ground you walk on."

"Nonsense! It's you."

"Pshaw! She is fascinated by what she's heard on one hand, and she shuts her eyes to what she has heard on the other. The war is young. We'll be beaten, of course, but not without some hard, desperate fighting. Your chance will come, and when it does—"

"I will master it or die!"

"Of course, but don't die. Master it."

an attempt to get to them. If we can blow up Admiral Vernon's flagship perhaps we can raise the blockade. At any rate, it's the only chance for the blockade runners to get out."

"Did the general order you to do this?"

"Certainly not. I suggested it to him. They don't order anyone to the David, you know."

"I should say not," returned Sempland.

"She's been down five times, hasn't she?"

"Yes, and every time with all of her crew."

"How many all told has she carried to death?"

"Some thirty or more, I believe."

"And she has never done any damage to the enemy."

"She scraped the paint off the New Iron-

your chances and improved them; give this to me."

Lacy hesitated.

"Sempland, you're a fool, as I said before. You're running away from the woman who loves you. You're risking your life."

"Never mind about that," returned the other. "She doesn't love me and I want to do it. For God's sake, old man, don't be selfish! Let me have an opportunity!"

Sempland was ordinarily a reticent and a quiet man, but this possibility awoke him into action. He pleaded so long, and so hard, and so determinedly that he overbore the weaker man and finally wrung from him a grudging assent to his request.

"If the general is willing I'll give you my chance."

"Thank you. God bless you! If I don't



"THANK YOU," HE SAID, "YOU HAVE REWARDED ME. GOOD-BYE."

Leave dying to me. I've sought ways for it and now one is at hand."

"What is it?"

"I am going to take out the David tonight."

"What?"

"Yes. It's a dead secret, but I can tell you. There are three blockade runners ready to sail. The Wabash lies off the Main Ship channel. Of course, all the others are blockaded, too, but General Beauregard thinks that if we can torpedo the flagship the others will hurry to her assistance and the blockade runners can get out through the Swash channel. Our magazines are running low and we must have arms, powder, everything. There are two or three shiploads at Nassau. This is

sides one night and scared her crew to death, I reckon, but that's all."

"Lacy!" cried Sempland, suddenly, "I have no right to ask favors of you, but—"

"That's all right. Ask."

"Let me go tonight."

"What's the use? One officer is enough, and you could not do any good by going along. I should be in command—"

"Let me go in your place!"

"Nonsense! It's almost certain death."

"I don't care. It's my chance. I can run the thing as well as you."

"Oh, anybody can run the thing for that matter."

"My life is of no more value to the south or to me than yours. Come! You have had

come back remember that you're to make a man of yourself—for her."

"You will come back. You must come back!"

"General Beauregard," said Lacy, as the two young officers were ushered into the general's office, "I have a most unusual request to make of you, sir."

"What is it, Major Lacy?" returned the other man.

"I want you to relieve me of the duty of taking out the David tonight, sir."

"What?"

"I want to give it to Mr. Sempland here."

"You wish to avoid the danger?" queried Beauregard, gazing intently at Lacy.

"He does it as a favor to me, general."